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ABSTRACT

One criticism of professionals in public service is that they resist changing the occupational norms that would decrease their power even though it would benefit their clients. In an examination of the relationship between professionalism and change, data were collected from elementary school principals, local school board members, and lay members of community health planning. Principals were slightly less inclined than school board members to accept change. The least professional of the three groups, community health members, were the most negative about change. The mixed findings may result partially from the spurious relationship between professionalism and change. Two additional variables were introduced to test this hypothesis: amount of "turbulence" or dissatisfaction among clients and diversity of viewpoints within groups. Controlling for the former variable yielded little difference; however, there was a strong positive relationship between diversity of viewpoints and change. Consequently, group consensus is seen as a major variable in predicting acceptance of change. (Author)

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PROFESSIONALISM AND RECEPTIVITY TO CHANGE

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Professionalism and Receptivity to Change

A century ago Herbert Spencer found fault with the tendency of professionals to look at things in terms of their own occupational biases.[1] Today, this and other criticisms about professionals persist. Professionals are seen as predominately middle class individuals concerned mainly with protecting their own vested interests. Their emphasis on narrow technicism, creditionalism, and classroom teaching instead of on-the-job training is seen as a means of accomplishing this.[2] The sociologist, Ben-David expresses it as follows: "Their (middle class) emphasis on welfare policies, such as the provision of educational and health services, scientific research or technological show-pieces, is no less a matter of self-interest for the professional person than industrial production and the distribution of consumer goods is for the bourgeois. Professional middle classes are interested in social conditions which are optimal for the efficient performance of their activities, just as businessmen are interested in conditions necessary for theirs."[3]

If these criticisms are correct, it follows that professionals should resist attempts to change those aspects of professionalism that would decrease their power (e.g., reduce credential requirements or change complex theoretical paradigms and technical methods of training), even if this benefits their clients. It also follows that professionals would tend to support the status quo and resist change. But recent research on the question of the resistence of professionals to change is inconclusive. After summarizing a large part of the research on the question, Hage and Aiken found that most studies showed a positive correlation between professionalism, change, and innovation.[4] There is,

on the other hand, considerable research that reaches the opposite conclusion. Gittel and Hevesi found that educators support the status-quo; Levine as well as Fishman and McCormack report the tendency of medical professionals to apply traditional models to situations where they are inappropriate.[5]

A number of reasons probably account for the contradictory findings on professionalism and change. In this paper we consider three possible reasons: (1) The use of the term, professionalism. Not only is the definitional domain of professionalism broad and varied, the term itself is frequently confused with another term, bureaucracy; (2) The use of different measures of change. Some researchers measure change attitudinally. For example, Gittell and Hevesi imply that the failure of the city schools is due to support of the"status-quo".[6] In other studies change is measured in terms of some form of action such as the number of programs adopted,[7] or the introduction of new teaching methods,[8] or the percent of man hours devoted to new health programs;[9] (3) The relationship between professionalism and change may be a function of contextual factors such as organizational complexity, the environment, degree of consensus, and so on. That is, the professional-change relationship may be a"spurious" one.

The data consists of interviews conducted in 1970 with 22 elementary school principals and 22 elected school board members in five local school districts in the borough of Brooklyn, New York. These five districts are among a total of thirty-three that were created in 1969 under the school decentralization bill that followed the Ocean-Hill Brownsville controversy and a city-wide teachers' strike.[10] Since the school districts in our sample do

not constitute a probability sample, we cannot use statistics to generalize to the population of all New York City school board members or elementary school principals, much less all "educators," or "professionals." We, therefore, treat our data primarily heuristically rather than as "proof" of the hypothesis that professionalism is related to change and innovation.

Measures of Professionalism and Change

The dependent variable is receptivity to change. Two different kinds of measures are used: (1) attitudes about change, and (2) actual behavior aimed at promoting change. Attitudes about decentralization in education have been used as the principal dimension of receptivity to change, based upon the assumption that decentralization and community control imply changes in credentials requirements, training methods, and in the scientific content of professional medical and educational models. Twelve Likert-type scaled items on equality in schools, community control, school effectiveness, and the local school boards were presented to the respondents.[11] Nine items on openness to change in general were also included.[12] The behavioral dimension was measured by a set of questions on participation in local community affairs.

Professionalism, as we said, often is confused with bureaucracy and, indeed, there are many similarities between the two terms. But there is a major distinction between them that serves to illuminate an important characteristic of professionals: whereas professionals organize themselves into voluntary associations for the purpose of self-control, bureaucratic control is achieved through the authority structure in an organization and is based

on status rather than competence.[13] For professionals, control derives from an institutionalized body of formal training. It is achieved through the sanctions of fellow professionals, and codes of ethics; professional control is primarily "horizontal" whereas bureaucratic control is "vertical".[14]

It is common in attempts to operationalize these complex dimensions of professionalism to distinguish between structural factors, such as formal education and entrance requirements, and attitudinal characteristics, such as a sense of calling and the use of colleagues as a major work reference.[15] But it is not possible to rely exclusively on either kind of measurement. Structural factors may be used to differentiate between groups, like nurses and professors, but they are likely to prove ineffective in measuring differences within a single group; for example, the overwhelming majority of practicing physicians in the U.S. have to meet similar licensing requirements and there is little difference among them in this regard. The attitudinal dimension of professionalism, primarily the "sense of calling", is a better way to generalize because it is more directly related to the control structure that distinguishes professionals from bureaucrats. Following Gouldner's local-cosmopolitan dimension, we can assume that disparate groups can be put on a continuum with regard to whether they are oriented more toward their professional colleagues than the agency in which they work. Thus, a nurse who cultivates her standing among her colleagues may be more professional than a doctor whose status depends solely on the organization in which he works, even though the latter has greater structural credentials.

But how can "sense of calling" be measured? We can try to measure it indirectly by tapping certain overt behavior that we logically might expect a person to engage in more, the greater his "sense of calling", or professionalism. The factors used here are participation in professional activity (how many professional organizations the respondent belongs to, how often the person attends meetings, and what offices he has held or run for), and stated attempts of the respondent to keep informed of the latest professional developments by reading journals.[16]

Since these questions tap only one dimension of professionalism we tried to validate the scale by another measure. We distinguished between a "professional" and an "amateur" on common sense criteria; if the activity the individual is engaged in is a full time endeavor for which he is paid, we consider him to be a professional; if he works only part time and without pay, he is an amateur. Thus, a member of a local school board who only spends a small amount of time on educational matters, but is a full time lawyer, engineer, or housewife is considered to be an amateur vis-a-vis education. Principals, because they are engaged in full time activity for pay are considered professionals.

Findings of the Study

Comparing principals and school board members on professionalism first, the principals are more professional as measured by "sense" of calling." 1) Seventy-three percent of the school board members belonged to a professional organization as compared to 95% of the principals; 2) 46% of the school board members and 92% of the principals belonged to two or more professional organizations; 3) 23% of the school board members had held a

position in a professional organization as contrasted to 55% of the principals; 4) 14% of the school board members attended professional organizational meetings "frequently" (mean attendance rate) compared to 36% of the principals; and 5) 45% of the school board members read professional journals "very often" (mean reading rate) compared to 50% of the principals.

Each question on the participation items were scored and summed for every member of the sample; the higher the individual's score, the more professional he is assumed to be. The scores of the 44 respondents range from a low of 4 to a high of 48. The coefficient of reliability for the five-item scale is .92.

The school board members also are slightly more in favor of specific change than the principals. Table I shows the percentage of school board members and principals who "agree" with statements on change (except for items 8,14,19, and 20, the more the respondent agrees, the more receptive to change he is). The two groups answered in the same direction on 9 of 12 specific change items having to do with educational policy (item number eight is reversed) and on all 9 of the statements concerning change in general (items number 14, 19 and 20 are reversed). That is, the two groups were in concert on 18 of the 21 statements, a remarkably high amount of congruence.[19] However, the school board members were more supportive of the specific change statements than the principals and thus slightly more receptive to change.[20] For example, while both groups agreed that community school boards should have overall control of all public schools in their districts (item number 12, table I), school board members have a higher agreement score on this item than principals.

(Put table I about here)

To get a more precise measure of this relationship, we summed the scores of each respondent for 21 change items (after reversing items 8,14,19. and 20), so a higher score means more willingness to accept change. Since a 1 was given for a "strongly agree" response and a 6 for a "strongly disagree" response, the highest possible score for the 21 items is 126 and the lowest is 21. The scores for the 44 respondents ranged from a high of 110 to a low of 52. We correlated this with the professionalism scores used to measure the "sense of calling" of each respondent. The correlation between the professionalism scores and the change scores was -.41. Thus we may conclude that the more professional a person is the less willing he is to accept change. Note, however, that professionalism accounts for only 16% of the variance of the dependent variable.

A careful look at the measures of professionalism and receptivity to change leads inexorably to the conclusion that there is some, but not a great deal of difference between principals (professionals) and school board members (amateurs) in their receptivity to change. The weak relationship that was found suggests that professionalism is only one of the variables that may explain willingness to accept change.

But is it the case that what a person actually does is more important than his attitude? This is the familiar criticism that is made about survey research, and to test this problem we tried to find out what action our respondents were taking to promote change. We asked them if they attended socials and church meetings in the

school community, whether they read local newspapers, and whether they brought in people from the local community to speak to students. (The assumption is that these activities are designed to promote greater contact with the community and this will, in turn, help change the schools). The school board members were much more active in all of these areas than the principals. The difference between the two groups in regard to their action was much greater than that concerning their attitudes. Thus we may conclude that in this research, a person's actions were significantly different than his expressed attitude; using the measure of behavior rather than attitudes, school board members were much more oriented toward change than principals.

Some Alternative Hypotheses

Our data does not yield clear conclusions about the relationship between professionalism and change. The school principals were less inclined than the school board members to accept change, but the differences in attitude, if not in actual behavior, were not of the magnitude to warrant sweeping conclusions that professionals are the main barrier to change. But if professionalism is not the major factor in receptivity to change, what is? We shall consider two additional variables here: (1) the amount of "turbulence" in the environment in which the organization operates; and (2) the degree of goal consensus among principals and school board members.[22]

"Turbulence" may be defined as the amount of controversy and dissatisfaction that exists among the clients of an organization. Testing the turbulence hypotheses was an easy matter because

three of the five districts in the sample are located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn where a greater number of controversies had broken out, while two districts are located in the middle class area where less controversy had developed. It seems reasonable to expect that the principals of the ghetto area schools would, out of fear for their positions, be more likely to express attitudes supportive of change in educational policy than principals in middle class districts. But when the differences in attitudes between the two areas are compared this turns out not to be the case. As Table II illustrates, there is more difference in attitudes between principals and board members than between the schools in the ghetto districts and the middle class districts. For example, the average difference between principals and school board members on the question of whether there should be quality in the schools is 1.44 and only .31 between respondents in the ghetto and the middle class districts.

(Put Table II Here)

Degree of consensus among group members is the next variable we considered. There are two reasons for picking this variable. One is the theory that change is more likely to occur through protest and dissensus than through bargaining and compromise. The second is the belief that professionalism fosters group cohesion and consensus and this, in turn, results in a decline in the influence of outsiders. Group consensus is seen primarily as a conservative force and thus inimical to change. Therefore, we might expect that there will be greater consensus among professional groups, and that they will be less likely to accept change.

Surprisingly, there was more consensus among school board members on the specific change items than among principals (items 1-12 on table I). The average standard deviation for these items for school board members was 1.53 and for principals 1.66. While this difference is not great, it shows that school board members are more unified in their attitudes than principals.

(Put Table III here)

To measure the correlation between consensus and receptivity to change, we used an ordinal measure of consensus developed by Leik.[23] The responses of the principals and school board members to the 21 items on change in table I were divided into two groups: (A) those for which consensus was high; and (B) those for which it was low (using the median as the cut-off point). For each group (high and low consensus), mean scores concerning attitudes and action in support of change were also computed. These were divided into two groups: (A) questions for which the willingness to accept change was high; and (B) questions for which the willingness to adopt changes is low (using the median for the cut-off point again). For each item the principals (or school board members) have been put into one of the four categories in accord with how they respond to each item as a group. As Table III indicated there is a strong positive relationship between the two variables for both principals and school board members. We may conclude from this that when consensus among the members of a group on a particular question is high, their expressed willingness to accept change is likely to be high. Put in the opposite way, we conclude that when members of a group are receptive to

change, they are more likely to agree about goals. Of even greater importance is the finding that the level of consensus (or diversity of opinion) in a group is a better predictor of the willingness to accept change than either professionalism or environmental turbulence.

The most surprising aspect of our findings is the positive relationship between consensus and change. It appears that a group that is more dedicated to achieving change will have greater cohesion. Of course, this may be expected, since it is another way of saying that the members will tend to agree about the need to change, whereas a group not committed to change will have greater diversity of views among its members. But this finding also runs counter to the theorists and strategists who believe that dissensus is a prelude to change and thus, it is not as obvious as may appear intuitively. Finally, we should emphasize that in the dynamics of organizational change, group consensus seems to be far more important than either professionalism or environmental turbulence. The significance of this finding for organization theory is complex enough to require additional research.

TABLE I

Means and Percent "Agreeing" of School Board Members and Principals on 21 Change Items

	School Board Members		Principals	
	Mean	%"Agree"	Mean	%Agree"
Equality in Schools				
(1) Equal expenditures per child	1.95	62	3.62	24
(2) Ethnic & racial integration	2.62	43	1.15	80
(3) Ethnic balance in schools	2.90	35	1.77	64
(4) Use of non-white standards	0.90	85	2.38	52
Community Control				
(5) Decentralization alone brings change	3.28	33	2.72	50
(6) Decentralization implies community control	3.19	43	3.90	25
(7) Community control means power for parents	2.14	62	1.50	70
School Effectiveness				
* (8) Teachers alone can judge school effectiveness	4.24	5	3.41	27
(9) Schools not families responsible for educational achievement	3.48	21	3.09	41
(10) Teachers are crucial variables in achievement	0.57	100	0.91	81
Community Board				
(11) Community Board must take initiative in change	1.76	67	1.32	82
(12) Community Boards should have greater control	0.85	90	2.04	59
Propensity to Change				
(13) Intellectuals and change	1.95	63	1.15	80
* (14) Must trust in the past	3.00	38	3.24	33
(15) System as a whole needs change	1.29	76	1.68	68
(16) There is a need for change	1.00	86	0.89	95
(17) New ideas are valuable	1.67	76	0.79	95
Information (openness toward)				
(18) Important to consider opposing views	0.38	100	0.59	91
* (19) Not enough time to consider opposing views	2.38	52	3.00	41
* (20) Considering many views is confusing	3.29	24	3.71	19
(21) Never have enough information on school decisions	1.57	71	1.00	91

* These items are scored such that greater agreement with them means less willingness to accept change whereas greater agreement with all the other items means more receptivity to change.

TABLE II

Difference of Means: Comparing Principals to School Board Members and Ghetto Districts to Middle Class Districts*

	Principals/ Board Members	Ghetto vs. Middle Class Districts
Equality in Schools (4 statements):	1.44	.31
Community Control (3 statements):	.80	.36
School Effectiveness (3 statements):	.53	.26
Community Board (2 statements):	.81	.82
Information (4 statements):	.46	.30
Propensity to Change (5 statements):	.48	.36

*Calculated by summing the difference between the means of the two groups for each statement, dividing that sum by the number of statements, and then subtracting the mean of one group from that of the other.

TABLE III

Level of Consensus and Attitudes
Toward Change (21 Change Items)

Principals

Expressed Willingness to Accept Change	Consensus: High	Consensus: Low
High	10	1
Low	1	10

Yule's Q = .97

School Board Members

Expressed Willingness to Accept Change	Consensus: High	Consensus: Low
High	8	3
Low	3	8

Yule's Q = .75

FOOTNOTES

1. Herbert Spencer, Study of Sociology (New York: Appleton Press, 1873), pp. 161-164.

2. Marilyn Gittell and Alan Hevesi, eds., The Politics of Urban Education (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp 156-157; Peter Schrag, "Why Our Schools Have Failed," Commentary, 45 (March, 1968), pp. 31-38; Sol Levine, "Community Interorganizational Problems in Providing Medical Care and Social Services, "American Journal of Public Health, 53 (August, 1963) "Unravelling Technology and Culture in Public Health, "American Journal of Public Health, (February, 1969) Jacob Fishman and John McCormack, "Mental Health Without Walls: Programs for the Ghetto," Current Psychiatric Therapies, 9(1969), pp 245-256; Everett C. Hughes, Men and Their Work (Glencoe: Free Press, 1958); University Research Corporation, National Institute for New Careers, "Comprehensive Health Services Career Development Technical Assistance Bulletin," (October 1971); Paul Davidoff, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning," Journal of the American Institute of Planners (November, 1965) Martin Meyerson and E.C. Banfield, Politics, Planning and the Public Interest Glencoe:(Free Press, 1955);Gerbert Gans, The Urban Villagers (Glencoe: Free Press, 1962); J.A. Jackson, Professions and Professionalization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

3. J. Ben-David, "Professions in the Class System of Present Day Society," Current Sociology, 12 (1963-4), pp 296-97.

4. Jerald Hage and Michael Aiken, Social Change in Complex Organizations (New York: Random House, 1970).

5. Gittell and Hevesi, op.cit., Fishman and McCormack, op.cit., Levine, op. cit.

6. Gittell and Hevesi, op.cit.

7. Jerald Hage and Michael Aiken, "Program Change and Organizational Properties: A Comparative Analysis," American Journal of Sociology, 72 (March, 1967), pp. 503-519 .

8. Paul Mort, in Donald Ross,ed., Administration for Adaptability (New York: Metropolitan School Study Council, 1958).

9. Dennis J. Palumbo, et. al., "A Systems Analysis of Local Public Health Departments," American Journal of Public Health, 59 (April, 1969).

10. The state legislative bill creating the 33 separate school districts was the compromise result of a controversy that began in 1967, centered around charges that the professionals in the school system were not educating black and Puerto Rican children of the ghetto. The decentralization bill did not provide the degree of community control which its supporters had hoped for, but it was assumed that the local school boards, which inherited some of the power formerly held by the central board, would provide the institutional structure for initiating change and improving the schools. Each district has a nine-member elected school board, a community school superintendent, and a number of elementary (K-6), junior high (7-10), and high schools (11-12). We contacted all of the elected school board members in 5 districts (45 members) and an equal number of principals (45) in the same districts. We were able to complete 22 interviews with the elected school board members and 22 with the principals.

11. Examples of statements are: Equality in Schools: "There should

be equal expenditures per child for equality of education;"

Community Control: "Community control means that parents will have policy-making power in broad terms...:"

School Effectiveness: "The crucial variable in achievement is the teacher:"

Community Board: "Community Boards should have overall control of Public Schools;"

Professionalism: "Professional training is more important than common sense..."

12. An example of these items is: "People ought to pay more attention to new ideas..." The items were taken from a study by Sister Marie Augusta Neal, Values and Interests in Social Change (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966).

13. Peter Blau and Richard Scott, Formal Organizations (San Francisco: Chandler, 1967); Alvin W. Gouldner, "Cosmopolitans and Locals," Administrative Science Quarterly, 2 (1957-58), pp.281-306; T. Caplow and R.J. McGee, The Academic Market Place (New York: Basic Books,1958); Harold C. Wilensky, Intellectuals in Labor Unions (Glencoe: Free Press, 1965); George Miller, "Professionals in Bureaucracy: Alienation Among Industrial Scientists and Engineers, "American Sociological Review, 32 (October, 1967), pp.281-306;Arthur Stinchcombe, "Bureaucratic and Craft Administration of Production: A Comparative Study," Administrative Science Quarterly, 4 (September, 1959),pp.168-187

14. Etzioni speaks of "interlocking controls" for professionals in organizations, because sanctions are initiated in both directions: from the organization to the profession and vic versa. Amatai Etzioni, a Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations (New York: Free Press,

1961),p. 259. Also see A.H. Halsey, Introduction to People and Planning, the Sociology of Housing (London: 1970). There is a tendency of researchers to lump bureaucracy and professionalism together. Some critics of professionalism may actually be criticizing and simply fail to make the distinction. For example, police administration lacks one of the essential characteristics of professionalism: it is a quasi-military authority structure and policemen are not judged in terms of peer or colleague acceptance. Thus to indicate professionalism on the grounds that the more "professional" police departments are less likely to solve law and order problems in the ghettos misses the point.

15. Richard Hall, "Professionalization and Bureaucratization," American Sociological Review 33 (February, 1968), pp.92-104.

16. The principals scored higher than school board members on this measure of professionalism. A higher percentage of principals belong to professional associations (95% as opposed to 73% for school board members), and read journals (90% as opposed to 82%).

17. The split-half technique and Spearman-Brown correction was used.

18. Part of this conguence may be attributable to the somewhat unique situation the principals found themselves in. The decentralized system had been in effect less than a year when the interviews were taken. It is conceivable that the principals viewed the changes as threats to their power, but because of their visibility, heightened during the controversy, were moved to indicate a willingness to accept change.

19. The exceptions are items 2 and 3 in Figure 1. Both statements deal with ethnic balance, a sensitive issue heightened because of

fears of busing or desires for racial and ethnic integrity.

20. Three response categories were changed to 0 for a"strongly agree" to 5 for a "strongly disagree" in the coding of the questionmaor.

21. See Mervyn Cadwallader, "The Cybernetic Analysis of Change in Complex Social Organizations," American Journal of Sociology 65 (1959), pp 154-157 . Anthony Downs, Inside Bureaucracy (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967); F. F. Emery and E. L. Trist, "The Causal Texture of Organizational Environments," Human Relations, 18 (1965), pp 31-32.

22. The Leik index of concensus provides a theoretical range of -1.0 when 50 percent of the responses are in each of the extreme categories, through 0.0 when responses are evenly divided among all categories, to +1.0 when all the responses are in one category. Robert K. Leik, "A measure of Ordinal Consensus Pacific Sociological Review, 9 (1966), pp. 85 - 90.